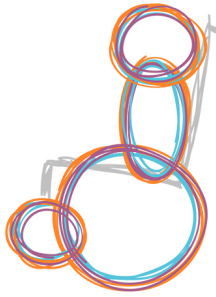


Do children with Down syndrome develop bilingual proficiency to the same degree that they master one language?

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Summary

Research has provided evidence that children can develop proficiency in two languages to the same degree as they can develop proficiency in one language, given proper exposure to the language(s). Further, there is evidence that bilingualism does not cause language impairments and that it should not be discouraged for children diagnosed with language impairment. However, there has been very little information available on bilingualism in children with Down syndrome and many researchers and clinicians still discourage bilingualism in this group as well as other groups of children with intellectual deficits.

About the study

This study examined the language abilities of a group of children with Down syndrome raised in bilingual environments and compared them to the language abilities of monolingual children with Down syndrome. Comparisons were also made to monolingual as well as bilingual children with typical development (no Down syndrome or other clinical impairments). Results revealed that children with Down syndrome exposed to a bilingual environment exhibited a similar profile of language proficiency as their monolingual counterparts, although considerable variability was observed. The results indicate that bilingual exposure did not have a detrimental effect on their language development.

What families and practitioners should know

Children with Down syndrome possess the ability to acquire bilingual language proficiency. Families should not be systematically advised to avoid bilingual exposure for their children with DS. • The results are preliminary and await replication with a larger group of children.

Reference

Kay-Raining Bird, E., Cleave, P., Trudeau, N., Elin Thordardottir, Sutton, A. & Thorpe, A. (2005). The language abilities of bilingual children with Down Syndrome. *American Journal of Speech Language pathology*, 14, 187-199.

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